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OLIVE RABBIT



SON OF CELLULOID

Adapted by STEVE NILES

Illustrated by LES EDWARDS OBI

SON OF CELLULOID

CLIVE BARKER

Adapted by STEVE NILES

Illustrated by LES EDWARDS

ECLIPSE  BOOKS

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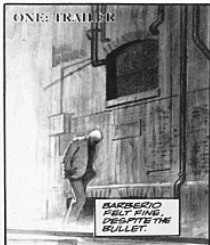
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ONE: TRAILER



BARBERIO
FELT PINE
DESPITE THE
BULLET.

SURE, THERE WAS A CATCH IN HIS
CHEST IF HE BREATHED TOO HARD
AND THE WOUND IN HIS THIGH
WASN'T PRETTY TO LOOK AT.
BUT HE'D BEEN HOLED UP
BEFORE AND COME BACK
SMILING.



NOW HE WISHED HE'D
HAD THE FORESIGHT
TO STEAL A LOOSER-
FITTING SUIT.

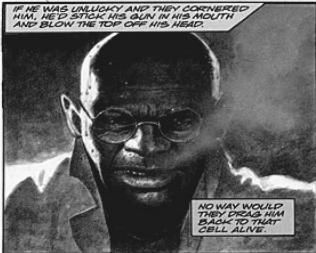


AT LEAST HE WAS FREE; THE
MAIN THING. NOBODY, NOBODY
WOULD EVER LOCK HIM
UP AGAIN.



HE'D KILL HIMSELF
RATHER THAN BE
TAKEN BACK
INTO CUSTODY.

IF HE WAS UNLUCKY AND THEY CORNERED
HIM, HE'D STICK HIS GUN IN HIS MOUTH
AND BLOW THE TOP OFF HIS HEAD.



NO WAY WOULD
THEY DRAIN HIM
BACK TO THAT
CELL ALIVE.

LIFE WAS TOO LONG
WHEN YOU WERE LOCKED
UP. LONG, AND REPETI-
TIVE, AND DEBILITATING.



BETTER TO STRING YOURSELF
UP BY YOUR BELT IN THE MIDDLE
OF THE NIGHT THAN FACE THE
TERRUM OF ANOTHER TWENTY-
FOUR HOURS, ALL EIGHTY-SIX
THOUSAND FOUR HUNDRED
SECONDS OF IT.



SO HE WENT
FOR BROKE.

SON of CELLULOID

FIRST HE BOUGHT A GUN ON THE PRISON BLACK MARKET. IT COST HIM EVERYTHING HE HAD AND A HANDFUL OF LOUS. HE'D HAVE TO MAKE GOOD ON THE OUTSIDE IF HE WANTED TO STAY ALIVE.

THEN HE MADE THE MOST OBVIOUS MOVE IN THE BOOK: HE CLIMBED THE WALL.

AND WHATEVER GOD LOOKED AFTER LIQUOR-STORE MUGGERS OF THIS WORLD WAS LOOKING AFTER HIM THAT NIGHT. BECAUSE HOT DAMN IF HE DIDN'T BOOOT RIGHT OVER THAT WALL AND AWAY WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A DOG SNIFFING AT HIS HEELS.

AND THE COPS IF WIN, THEY SCREWED UP EVERY WHICH WAY FROM SUNDAY, LOOKING FOR HIM WHERE HE'D NEVER GONE, PULLING IN HIS BROTHER AND SISTER-IN-LAW ON SUSPICION OF HARBORING HIM WHEN THEY DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HE'D ESCAPED.



HE'D TAKEN THE BOOZE AND SYMPATHY AND GONE ON HIS WAY, TRUSTING TO THE LEGENDARY IDIOCY OF THE LAW AND THE GOD WHO'D GOTTEN HIM SO FAR ALREADY.



SING-SING HE CALLED THIS GOD, PICTURED HIM AS A FAT GUY WITH A GRIN THAT HOOKED FROM EAR TO EAR, A PRIME SALAMI IN ONE HAND, A CUP OF BLACK COFFEE IN THE OTHER.

THEY EVEN, THE IDIOTS, PUT OUT AN ALL-POINTS BULLETIN WITH A DESCRIPTION OF HIS PRE-PRISON SELF, TWENTY POUNDS HEAVIER THAN HE WAS NOW.

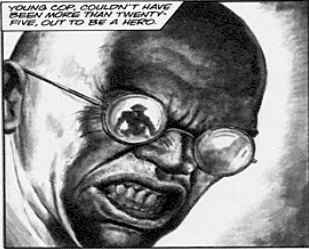


ALL THIS HE'D HEARD FROM GERALDINE, A LADY HE'D COURTED IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS, WHO'D GIVEN HIM A DRESSING FOR HIS LEGS AND THE BOTTLE OF SOUTHERN COMFORT THAT WAS NOW ALMOST EMPTY IN HIS POCKET.



UNFORTUNATELY, SING-SING HAD BEEN LOOKING THE OTHER WAY WHEN THE ONE EAGLE-EYED COP IN THE WHOLE CITY SPOTTED BARRERO DRAINING HIS SNAKE IN A BACK ALLEY, AND RECOGNIZED HIM FROM THAT OBSOLETE A.P.B.

YOUNG COP, COULDN'T HAVE BEEN MORE THAN TWENTY-FIVE, OUT TO BE A HERO.



HE WAS TOO DUMB TO LEARN
THE LESSON OF BARBERIO'S
WARNING SHOT.

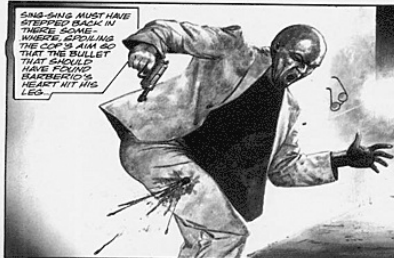


INSTEAD OF TAKING
COVER AND LETTING
BARBERIO HAVE A
BREAK, THE COP
FORCED THE ISSUE.



BARBERIO HAD
NO CHOICE.
HE FIRED.

SING-SING MUST HAVE
STEPPED BACK IN
THERE SOME-
WHERE, SPINDLING
THE COP'S AIM SO
THAT THE BULLET
THAT SHOULD
HAVE FOUND
BARBERIO'S
HEART HIT HIS
LEG.



... AND GUIDING THE
RETURNING SHOT
STRAIGHT INTO THE
COP'S NOSE.



EAGLE-EYE WENT DOWN AS
IF HE'D JUST REMEMBERED
AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE
GROUND.

BARBERIO WAS AWAY,
CURSING, BLEEDING,
AND SCARED.



QUITE AN
INTRODUCTION
TO THE
CRIMINAL.

HE'D NEVER
SHOT A MAN
BEFORE, AND
HE'D STARTED
WITH A COP.

SING-SING WAS STILL WITH HIM THOUGH
THE BULLET IN HIS LEG ASKED, BUT
GERALDINE'S MINISTRATIONS
STOPPED THE BLEED. THE LIQUOR
HAD DONE WONDERS FOR THE PAIN,
AND HALF A DAY LATER HE WAS
HALFWAY ACROSS A CITY SO THICK
WITH VENGEFUL COPS IT WAS LIKE
A PSYCHO'S PARADE AT A
POLICE-MAN'S BALL.

NOW ALL HE ASKED OF HIS PRO-
TECTOR WAS A PLACE TO REST
AWHILE. NOT FOR LONG, JUST
ENOUGH TIME TO CATCH HIS
BREATH AND PLAN HIS FUTURE
MOVEMENTS. AN HOUR OR
TWO OF SHUT-EYE WOULDN'T
GO AMISS EITHER.



THING WAS HE'D GOT THAT BELLY-ACHE, THE DEEP, GNAWING PAIN HE GOT MORE AND MORE THESE DAYS.

MAYBE HE'D FIND A PHONE, WHEN HE'D RESTED FOR A TIME, AND CALL GERALDINE AGAIN, GET HER TO SWEET-TALK A DOCTOR INTO SEEING HIM. HE'D BEEN PLANNING TO GET OUT OF THE CITY BEFORE MIDNIGHT, BUT THAT DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A PLAUSIBLE OPTION NOW.



DANGEROUS AS IT WAS, HE WOULD HAVE TO STAY IN THE LOCALITY A NIGHT AND MAYBE THE BEST PART OF THE NEXT DAY, THEN MAKE HIS BREAK FOR THE OPEN COUNTRY WHEN HE'D RECOUPED A LITTLE ENERGY AND HAD THE BULLET TAKEN OUT OF HIS LEG.

JEEZ, BUT THAT BELLY GRIPED. HIS QUESSA WAS IT WAS AN ULCER, BROUGHT ON BY THE FILTHY SLOP THEY CALLED FOOD AT THE PENITENTIARY.



LOTS OF GUYS HAD BELLY AND SHIT-CHUTE PROBLEMS IN THERE. HE'D BE BETTER AFTER A FEW DAYS OF PIZZA AND BEERS, HE WAS DAMN SURE OF THAT.



THE WORD CANCER WASN'T IN BARBERIO'S VOCABULARY.



HE NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT TERMINAL DISEASE, ESPECIALLY IN REFERENCE TO HIMSELF. THAT WOULD BE LIKE A PIECE OF SLAUGHTER-HOUSE BEEF FRETTING ABOUT AN INGROWN HOOK AS IT STEPPED UP TO MEET THE GUN.

A MAN IN BARBERIO'S TRADE, SURROUNDED BY LETHAL TOOLS, DOESN'T EXPECT TO PERISH FROM MALIGNANCY IN HIS BELLY.



BUT THAT'S WHAT THE ACHE WAS.

THE LOT IN BACK OF THE MOVIE PALACE CINEMA HAD BEEN A RESTAURANT, BUT FIRE HAD GUTTED IT THREE YEARS BACK, AND THE GROUND HAD NEVER BEEN CLEARED.

THE JUNGLE OF CONVULVULUS AND ROTTED TIMBERS SUITED BARBERIO JUST FINE. HIS LEG WAS GIVING HIM TROUBLE, AND THE PAIN IN HIS BELLY WAS WORSENING.



IT WAS ONE THIRTY A.M.



A SPOT TO LAY DOWN HIS CLAMMY HEAD WAS NEEDED, AND DAMN QUICK. FINISH OFF THE SOUTHERN COMFORT, AND THINK ABOUT GERALDINE.



THE REFUGE STANK OF FISH, HUMAN AND CAT, OF GARAGE, OF OLD FIRES, BUT IT FELT LIKE SANCTUARY.

ALONG THE WALL A LITTLE WAY SOME KIDS HAD BUILT A MAKESHIFT DEN OF GARDERS, FIRE BLACKENED PLANKS AND CORRUGATED IRON.



A SANCTUARY WITHIN A SANCTUARY.



SING-SING WAS SMILING ON HIM TONIGHT. ALL GREASY CHOPS.

SOMEBODY ELSE HAD USED THIS PLACE TO SLEEP IN: HE COULD FEEL DAMP SACKING UNDER HIS HAND AS HE SAT DOWN.



THERE WAS A SMELL CLOSE BY HE DIDN'T WANT TO THINK TOO MUCH ABOUT.

NO MORE THAN A BLOCK AWAY, PERHAPS HALF A BLOCK, THE BLADE-IN-THE-NIGHT WAIL OF A COP CAR BEGAN, AND BARBERIO'S NEWLY ACQUIRED SENSE OF SECURITY SANK WITHOUT A TRACE.



THEY WERE CLOSING IN FOR THE KILL, HE KNEW IT.

ALL IN ALL, IT WAS SQUALID, BUT IT WAS SAFER THAN THE STREET.



HE SAT WITH HIS BACK AGAINST THE WALL OF THE MOVIE PALACE AND EXHALED HIS FEARS IN A LONG, SLOW BREATH.

THEY'D BEEN PLAYING WITH HIM ALL ALONG, LETTING HIM THINK HE WAS AWAY, ALL THE TIME CRUISING HIM LIKE SHARKS, SLEEK AND SILENT, UNTIL HE WAS TOO TIRED TO PUT UP ANY RESISTANCE.



CHRIST, HE'D KILLED A COP. WHAT THEY WOULDN'T DO TO HIM ONCE THEY HAD HIM ALONE...

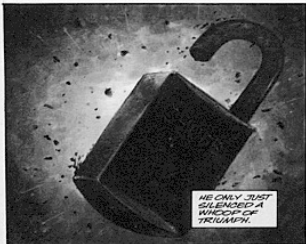
THEY'D CRUCIFY HIM.



"OKAY, SING-SING. WHAT NOW?"

"GET ME OUT OF THIS."





HE ONLY JUST
SILENCED A
WHISPER OF
TRIUMPH.



NOW TO OPEN THE GRILLE, TO GET OUT OF
THIS WRETCHED WORLD INTO THE DARK.

PAIN, A CONTINUUM OF
PAIN THAT RAN FROM
HIS BELLY TO HIS
BOWEL TO HIS
LEG, MADE
HIS HEAD
SPIN.

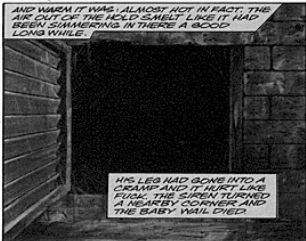
OPEN,
DAMN
YOU,
OPEN.



THE DOOR
CONCEDED...

...REVEALING THE
DARKNESS WITHIN
THE DARKNESS THAT
WAS THE INTERIOR
OF THE MOVIE
PALACE.

"LET THE COP CAR
COME. I'VE GOT
MY HIDEY-HOLE
TO KEEP ME WARM."



AND WARM IT WAS, ALMOST HOT IN FACT. THE
AIR OUT OF THE HOLE SMELT LIKE IT HAD
BEEN SUMMERING IN THERE A GOOD
LONG WHILE.

HIS LEG HAD GONE INTO A
CRAMP AND IT HURT LIKE
FUCK. THE SIREN TURNED
A NEARBY CORNER AND
THE BABY WAIL DIED.

WASN'T THAT THE PITTER OF LAW-
LIKE FEET HE COULD HEAR?



CHILDLIKE, BARBERIO
FELT SURE NOBODY
COULD POSSIBLY FIND
HIM HERE, AS LONG AS
HE COULDN'T SEE HIS
PURSUERS, HIS
PURSUERS COULDN'T
SEE HIM.

RIGHT?

IF THE COPS DID INDEED DUCK INTO THE LOT FOR HIM, HE DIDN'T HEAR THEM. MAYBE HE'D BEEN MISTAKEN, MAYBE THEY WERE AFTER SOME POOR PLANK ON THE STREET, AND NOT HIM.

FUNNY, THE AIR WASN'T SO BAD IN HERE AFTER ALL. IT WASN'T THE STAGNANT AIR OF A CRAWL SPACE OR AN ATTIC... THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE HIDEY-HOLE WAS ALIVE.

NOT FRESH AIR, NO IT WASN'T THAT, IT SMELT OLD AND TRAPPED SURE ENOUGH, BUT IT WAS BUZZING NEVERTHELESS.

IT SANG IN HIS EARS, IT MADE HIS SKIN TINGLE LIKE A COLD SHOWER. IT WORKED ITS WAY UP HIS NOSE AND PUT THE WERDST THINGS IN HIS HEAD.

IT WAS LIKE BEING HIGH ON SOMETHING HE FELT THAT GOOD.

HIS LEG DIDN'T HURT ANYMORE, OR IF IT DID HE WAS TOO DISTRACTED TO NOTICE...

...DISTRACTED BY THE PICTURES IN HIS HEAD.

HE WAS FILLING UP TO OVERFLOWING WITH PICTURES: DANCING GIRLS, AND KISSING COUPLES, FAREWELLS AT STATIONS, OLD DARK HOUSES...

...COMEDIANS...

SCENES HE'D NEVER LIVED IN A MILLION YEARS, BUT THAT MOVED HIM LIKE RAW EXPERIENCE, TRUE AND INCONTESIBLE.

...AND UNDERSEA ADVENTURES.

HE WANTED TO CRY AT THE FAREWELLS, EXCEPT THAT HE WANTED TO LAUGH AT THE COMEDIANS, EXCEPT THAT THE GIRLS NEEDED CRYING, THE COMEDIANS NEEDED HOLLERING FOR

WHAT KIND OF PLACE WAS THIS, ANYHOW?

BARBERIO WAS TOO BEFUDDELED TO RECOGNIZE THE ORIGINS OF THE LIGHT, AND HIS MURMURING EARS COULDN'T MAKE SENSE OF THE DIALOGUE FROM THE SCREEN ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL.



IT WAS "SATYRICON," THE SECOND OF TWO FELLINI II MOVIES THE MOVIE PALACE WAS SHOWING AS THEIR LATE-NIGHT DOUBLE FEATURE THAT SATURDAY.

BARBERIO HAD NEVER SEEN THE MOVIE, NEVER EVEN HEARD OF FELLINI. IT WOULD HAVE DISGUSTED HIM (FASBOT FILM, ITALIAN CRAP). HE PREFERRED UNDERSEA ADVENTURES, WAR MOVIES, OH, AND DANCING GIRLS.



ANYTHING WITH DANCING GIRLS.



WHY, THOUGH HE WAS ALONE IN HIS HIDEY-HOLE, HE HAD THE SENSATION OF BEING WATCHED.

THROUGH THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF ROUTINES THAT WAS PLAYING ON HIS SKULL, HE FELT EYES.

NOT A FEW--THOUSANDS--WATCHING HIM.



THE FEELING WASN'T SO BAD YOU'D TAKE A DRINK FOR IT, BUT THEY WERE ALWAYS THERE, STARTING AT HIM LIKE HE WAS SOMETHING WORTH LOOKING AT, LAUGHING AT HIM SOMETIMES, CRYING SOMETIMES, BUT MOSTLY JUST GAWKING WITH HUNGRY EYES.

TRUTH WAS, THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO ABOUT THEM ANYHOW. HIS LIMBS HAD GIVEN UP. HE COULDN'T FEEL HIS HANDS OR FEET AT ALL.

HE DIDN'T KNOW, AND IT WAS PROBABLY BETTER THAT HE DIDN'T. THAT HE'D TORN OPEN HIS WOUND GETTING INTO THIS PLACE.

AND HE WAS BLEEDING TO DEATH.



ABOUT TWO FIFTY-FIVE A.M. AS FELLINI'S "SATYRICON" CAME TO ITS AMBIGUOUS END, BARBERIO DIED IN THE SPACE BETWEEN THE BACK OF THE BUILDING, PROPER, AND THE BACK WALL OF THE CINEMA.

THE MOVIE PALACE HAD ONCE BEEN A MISSION HALL, AND IF HE LOOKED BEHIND HIM AS HE DIED HE MIGHT HAVE Glimpsed THE THEFT PRESSED DEPICTING AN ANGELIC HOST, AND ASSUMED HIS OWN ASSUMPTION.

BUT BARBERIO DIED WATCHING DANCING GIRLS, AND THAT WAS FINE BY HIM.

THE FALSE WALL, THE ONE THAT LET THROUGH THE LIGHT FROM THE BACK OF THE SCENE, HAD BEEN ERECTED AS A MAKE-SHIFT PARTITION TO COVER THE FRESCO. IT HAD SEEMED MORE RESPECTFUL TO DO THAT THAN TO PAINT THE ANGELS OUT PERMANENTLY, AND BESIDES THE MAN WHO ORDERED THE ALTERATIONS HAD SUSPECTED THAT THE MOVIE HOUSE BUBBLE WOULD BURST SOONER OR LATER. IF SO, HE COULD SIMPLY DEMOLISH THE WALL AND BE TO BUSINESS FOR THE WORSHIP OF GOD INSTEAD OF GARBO.

IT NEVER HAPPENED.



THE BUBBLE, THOUGH FRAGILE, NEVER BURST, AND THE MOVIES CARRIED ON, THE DOUBTING THOMAS (HIS NAME WAS HARRY CLEVELAND) DIED, AND THE SPACE WAS FORGOTTEN.

NOBODY NOW LIVING EVEN KNEW IT EXISTED.

IF HE'D SEARCHED THE CITY FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, BARBERIO COULDN'T HAVE FOUND A MORE SECRET PLACE TO PERISH.

THE SPACE HOWEVER, THE AIR ITSELF, HAD LIVED A LIFE OF ITS OWN IN THAT FIFTY YEARS. LIKE A RESERVOIR, IT HAD RECEIVED THE ELECTRIC STARKS OF A THOUSAND EYES, OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF EYES.

HALF A CENTURY OF MOVIE-GOERS HAD LIVED VICARIOUSLY THROUGH THE SCREEN OF THE MOVIE PALACE, PRESSING THEIR SYMPATHIES, AND THEIR PASSIONS ON TO THE FLICKERING ILLUSION, THE ENERGY OF THEIR EMOTIONS GATHERING STRENGTH LIKE A NEGLECTED COSMOS IN THAT HIDDEN PASSAGE OF AIR.



SOONER OR LATER, IT MUST DISCHARGE ITSELF. ALL IT LACKED WAS A CATALYST.

UNTIL BARBERIO'S CANCER.

TWO:
THE MAIN FEATURE

AFTER LOITERING IN THE CRAMPED FOYER OF THE MOVIE PALACE FOR TWENTY MINUTES OR SO, THE YOUNG GIRL IN THE DRESS AND LEMON PRINT DRESS BEGAN TO LOOK DISTINCTLY AGITATED.

IT WAS ALMOST THREE IN THE MORNING, AND THE LATE-NIGHT MOVIES WERE WELL OVER.

TONIGHT HAD BEEN TWO EASTWOOD MOVIES... SPAGNETTI WESTERNS. THE GIRL IN THE DRESS DIDN'T LOOK LIKE MUCH OF A WESTERN FAN TO BIRDY.

MAYBE SHE'D COME FOR EASTWOOD RATHER THAN THE VIOLENCE, THOUGH BIRDY HAD NEVER SEEN THE ATTRACTION OF THAT ETERNALLY SCOWLING FACE.

CAN I HELP YOU?

I'M WAITING FOR MY BOYFRIEND... DEAN.

HAVE YOU LOST HIM?

HE WENT INTO THE RESTROOM AT THE END OF THE MOVIE AND HE HASN'T COME OUT YET.

WAS HE FEELING...
OR...
ILL?

OH NO.

THE GIRL SPOKE QUICKLY, PROTECTING HER BOYFRIEND'S SOBRIETY.

I'LL GET SOMEONE TO GO LOOK FOR HIM.

IT WAS LATE, SHE WAS TIRED, AND THE SPEED WAS WEARING OFF. THE IDEA OF SPENDING ANY MORE TIME THAN SHE STRICTLY NEEDED TO IN THIS FLEA PIT WAS NOT PARTICULARLY APPEALING. SHE WANTED HOME--BED AND SLEEP JUST SLEER AT THIRTY-FOUR, SHE'D DECIDED SHE'D GROWN OUT OF SEX.

BED WAS FOR SLEEP, ESPECIALLY FOR FAT GIRLS.

RICKY?

RICKY WAS LOOKING UP THE BACK EXIT, AT THE FAR END OF THE GINEMA.

THAT SMELL IS COMPLETELY GONE.

GOOD.

A FEW MONTHS BACK, THERE'D BEEN A HELL OF A STENCH AT THE SOUTHERN END OF THE CINEMA.



THEY WERE HARDLY ON SPEAKING TERMS THESE DAYS. TOO MANY HIGH TIMES TOGETHER. IT ALWAYS DEALT A CRIPPLING BLOW TO FRIENDSHIPS IN THE LONG RUN.

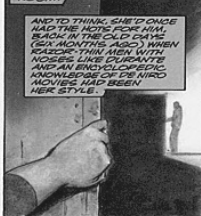


BESIDES, BIRDY'D HAD SOME VERY UNCHARITABLE (ACCURATE) REMARKS ABOUT HIS ASSOCIATES, AND HE'D RETURNED THE SALVO WITH GUNS BLAZING.

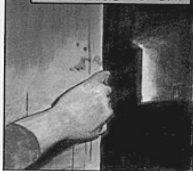
THEY HADN'T SPOKEN FOR THREE AND A HALF WEEKS AFTER THAT. NOW THERE WAS AN UNCOMFORTABLE TRUCE, MORE FOR CANITY'S SAKE THAN ANYTHING.



BIRDY WATCHED HIM DUCK INTO THE MEN'S ROOM.



NOW SHE SAW HIM FOR WHAT HE WAS, FLOTSAM FROM THE LOST SHIP OF HOPE. STILL A FILL FREAK, STILL A THEORETICAL BISEXUAL, STILL DEVOTED TO EARLY POLANSKY MOVIES AND SYMBOLIC PACIFISM.





OF ALL THE OPTIONS, AS TO WHY SHE'D NEVER BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN LOVE, BIRDY OPTED FOR THE FAT ARMS AS THE LIKELIEST EXPLANATION.

WHEREAS THIS GIRL HAD ARMS AS SLENDER AS A BALINESE DANCER'S, HER WRISTS LOOKED THIN AS GLASS, AND ABOUT AS FRAGILE.

SICKENING, REALLY. SHE WAS PROBABLY A LOUSY CONVERSATIONALIST TO BOOT. GOD, THE GIRL HAD ALL THE ADVANTAGES.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

LINDY LEE.

IT WOULD BE.

RICKY THOUGHT HE'D MADE A MISTAKE. THIS COULDN'T BE THE TOILET.

HE WAS STANDING IN WHAT APPEARED TO BE THE MAIN STREET OF A FRONTIER TOWN HE'D SEEN IN TWO HUNDRED WESTERNS.

THROUGH THE SWIRL OF DUST, GREY AIR HE COULD PICK OUT, HE THOUGHT, THE GENERAL STORE, THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE, AND THE SALOON. THEY STOOD IN LIEU OF THE TOILET CUBICLES.

NO SIGN OF TILES. NO SIGN OF ANYTHING THAT WAS FAINTLY TOILET-LIKE.

IT WAS A LIE, OF COURSE, THE WHOLE THING WAS A LIE. SURELY IF HE CONCENTRATED HE'D BE ABLE TO SEE THROUGH THE MIRAGE...



...TO SEE HOW IT HAD BEEN ACHIEVED; THE PROJECTIONS, THE CONCEALED LIGHTING-EFFECTS--ALL THE TRICKS OF THE TRADE.

BUT THOUGH HE CONCENTRATED AS HARD AS HIS SLIGHTLY SPACED OUT CONDITION WOULD ALLOW...



HE JUST COULDN'T SEEM TO GET HIS FINGERS UNDER THE EDGE OF THE ILLUSION TO STRIP IT BACK.

SOMEWHERE IN THE STORM, A BARN DOOR WAS SLAMMING. HE COULD EVEN SMELL HORSE SHIT.



THE EFFECT WAS SO DAMN PERFECT, HE WAS BREATHLESS WITH ADMIRATION.

BUT WHOEVER HAD CREATED THIS EXTRAORDINARY SET HAD PROVED THEIR POINT. HE WAS IMPRESSED. NOW IT WAS TIME TO STOP THE GAME.

HE TURNED BACK TO THE TOILET DOOR. IT WAS GONE. A WALL OF DUST HAD ERASED IT, AND SUDDENLY HE WAS LOST AND ALONE.



RICKY TASTED SOMETHING HE HADN'T EXPERIENCED SINCE CHILDHOOD: THE PANIC OF LOSING THE HAND OF A GUARDIAN.

IN THIS CASE THE LOST FARENT WAS HIS SANITY.

BLAM!



SOMEWHERE TO HIS LEFT A SHOT SOUNDED IN THE DEFT OF THE STORM, AND HE HEARD SOMETHING WHISTLE IN HIS EAR.



SOMEONE HAD EITHER JUST MISSED BLOWING HIS HEAD OFF OR WAS REALLY PLAYING SILLY FUCKERS.



HEY, MAN.

I DON'T LIKE THIS.

HE RUMMAGED IN HIS POCKET FOR A PILL OR TWO, ANYTHING TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION, BUT HE WAS ALL OUT OF INSTANT SUNSHINE, NOT EVEN A LOWLY VALIUM TO BE FOUND. HE FELT NAKED.

BLAM!



WHAT A TIME TO BE LOST IN THE MIDDLE OF ZANE GREY'S NIGHTMARE.

THEN HE HEARD THE UNMISTAKABLE FLAP OF THE SALOON DOOR.

DID HE SEE A YOUNG MAN STUMBLING OUT, LEAVING BEHIND HIM A PAINTED WORLD OF TABLES, MIRRORS, AND GUNSLINGERS?



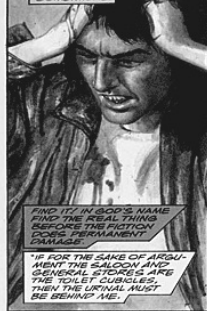


RICKY FELT SOMETHING VERY LIKE COLD TURKEY IN HIS SYSTEM. HIS LIMBS BEGAN A ST. VITUS' DANCE AND THE URGE TO PISS CAME ON HIM VERY STRONG. ANOTHER HALF-MINUTE, HE'D WET HIS PANTS.



SOMEWHERE IN THIS WILD WORLD, THERE IS A URINAL. THERE IS A GRAFFITI-COVERED WALL WITH NUMBERS FOR THE SEX-CRAZED TO CALL.

SOMEWHERE.



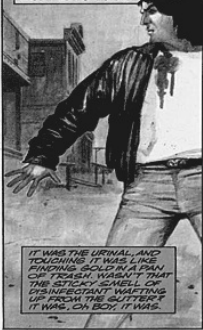
"IF FOR THE SAKE OF ARGUMENT THE SALOON AND GENERAL STORES ARE THE TOILET CUBICLES, THEN THE URINAL MUST BE BEHIND ME."

"SO STEP BACKWARD. IT CAN'T DO YOU ANY MORE HARM THAN STAYING HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET WHILE SOMEONE TAKES POT-SHOTS AT YOU."



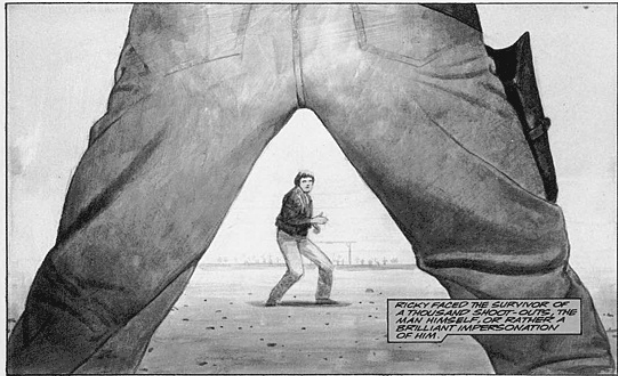
TWO STEPS, TWO CAUTIOUS STEPS, AND HE FOUND ONLY AIR.

BUT ON THE THIRD—WELL, WHAT HAVE WE HERE?—HIS HAND TOUCHED COLD TILE SURFACE.



IT WAS THE URINAL, AND TOUCHING IT WAS LIKE FINDING GOLD IN A PAN OF TRASH. WASN'T THAT THE STICKY SHELL OF DISINFECTANT WAFTING UP FROM THE GUTTER? IT WAS, OH BOY, IT WAS.





IT WAS A MIDDLE PERIOD
WAYNE, BEFORE HE'D GROWN
FAT AND SICK LOOKING.

A RIO GRANDE WAYNE,
DUSTY FROM THE LONG
TRAIL AND SQUINTING
FROM A LIFETIME OF
LOOKING AT THE
HORIZON.

RICKY HAD NEVER HAD A TASTE FOR WESTERNS



HE HATED ALL THE FORCED
MACHISMO, THE GLORIFI-
CATION OF DIRT AND CHEAP
HEROISM. HIS GENERATION
HAD PUT FLOWERS IN
RIFLE BARRELS, AND HE'D
THOUGHT THAT WAS A
GOOD THING TO DO AT THE
TIME. STILL DID, IN FACT.



THIS FACE, SO MOCK-MANLY, SO
UNCOMFORTING, PERSONIFIED A
HANDFUL OF LETHAL LIES—ABOUT
THE GLORY OF AMERICA'S FRONT-
IER ORIGINS, THE MORALITY OF
SWIFT JUSTICE, THE TENDERNESS
IN THE HEART OF BRUTES.



RICKY HATED THE FACE.
HIS HANDS ITCHED TO
HIT IT.



FUCK IT.



IT WAS A
SPECTACULAR
DISPLAY.

THE BIGGER MAN REELED
BACKWARD UNDER
RICKY'S BLOWS...



...AND TRIPPED, HIS SPLUR
CATCHING IN THE DEAD BOY'S
HAIR.



RICKY FELT A THRILL HE'D NEVER TASTED BEFORE-- THE EXHILARATION OF PHYSICAL TRIUMPH.



MY GOD! HE'D BROUGHT DOWN THE GREATEST COWBOY IN THE WORLD!

RICKY'S CRITICAL FACILITIES WERE OVERWHELMED BY VICTORY.



GET UP.

THE DUST STORM SUDDENLY THICKENED.



I SAID, GET UP!



WELL, BOY, WE'LL MAKE A MAN OF YOU YET...

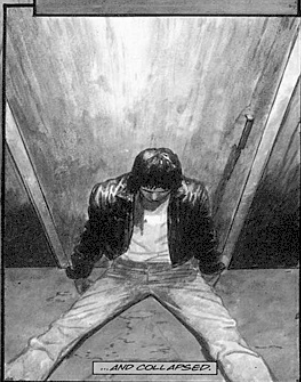




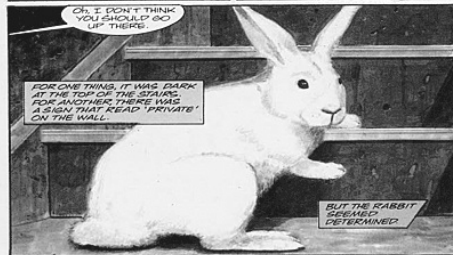
BEFORE HE COULD MAKE ANY SENSE OF WHERE HE WAS, THE ROARING STORM SPAT HIM OUT INTO THE SILENCE OF THE MOVIE PALACE.

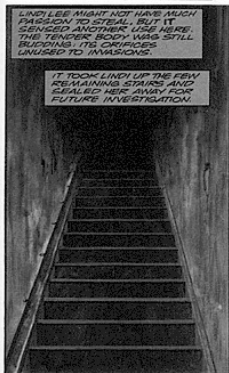


THERE, THOUGH HE PROMISED HIMSELF TO BUTCH UP, HE GAVE A CRY THAT WOULD NOT HAVE SHAMED FAY WRAY...



...AND COLLAPSED.

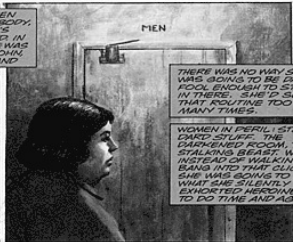






Uhhhhhhh.
RICKY?!

OBVIOUSLY HE'D BEEN
ATTACKED BY SOMEBODY,
POSSIBLY LINDI LEE'S
ABSENT BOYFRIEND, IN
WHICH CASE, WHERE WAS
HE? STILL IN THE JOHN,
PERHAPS, ARMED AND
DANGEROUS.



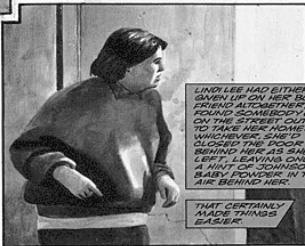
MEN

THERE WAS NO WAY SHE
WAS GOING TO BE DAMN
FOOL ENOUGH TO STEP
IN THERE. SHE'D SEEN
THAT ROUTINE TOO
MANY TIMES.

WOMEN IN PERIL, STAN-
DARD STUFF, THE
DARKENED ROOM, THE
STALKING BEAST, WELL,
INSTEAD OF WALKING
BANG INTO THAT CLICHE
SHE WAS GOING TO DO
WHAT SHE SILENTLY
EXHORTED HERGONES
TO DO TIME AND AGAIN.



DEFY HER CURIOSITY
AND CALL THE FUCKING
COPS.



LINDI LEE HAD EITHER
GIVEN UP ON HER BOY-
FRIEND ALTOGETHER, OR
FOUND SOMEBODY ELSE
ON THE STREET OUTSIDE
TO TAKE HER HOME.
WHICHEVER, SHE'D
CLOSED THE DOOR
BEHIND HER AS SHE
LEFT, LEAVING ONLY
A HINT OF JOHNSON'S
BABY POWDER IN THE
AIR BEHIND HER.

THAT CERTAINLY
MADE THINGS
EASIER.



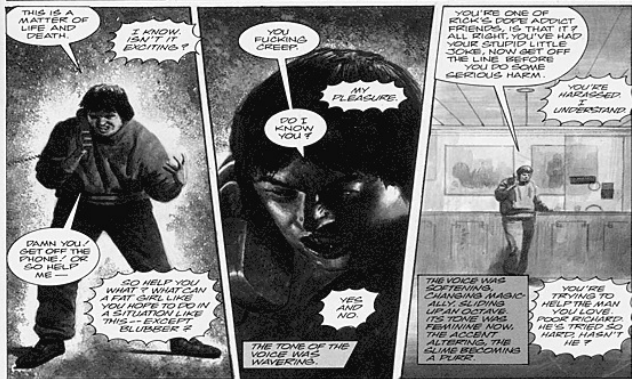
SHE WAS ACTUALLY
RATHER PLEASED
TO THINK THAT THE
GIRL HAD FOUND
THE COMMON
SENSE TO GIVE
UP ON HER LOUSY
DATE.



HELLO THERE, IT'S
A LITTLE LATE
AT NIGHT TO BE
USING THE
PHONE, ISN'T
IT?

IT WASN'T THE
OPERATOR.
SHE HADN'T
EVEN PUNCHED
A NUMBER.

BESIDES, IT
SOUNDED LIKE
PETER LORKE.





THERE WAS NO WAY IN HELL SHE WAS GOING UP THERE. FOR REASONS. SEE HERDANE'S IN PERIL. CHAPTER ONE.

FOUR: SHE HAD TO OPEN THE DOOR WITH RICKY'S KEYS.

RIGHT. THERE WAS THE IMPERATIVE: GET THE KEYS FROM RICKY.

THE HOUSE LIGHTS WERE JUMPY, OR WAS IT JUST PANIC IN HER OPTIC NERVE? NO, THEY WERE FLICKERING.

IGNORE IT. FETCH THE KEYS.

BIRDY LOOKED FOR THE KEYS, BUT RICKY'S BELT HAD DISAPPEARED.

RICKY? CAN YOU HEAR ME? IT'S BIRDY, RICK. BIRDY.

BIRDY?

WE'RE LOCKED IN, RICKY. WHERE ARE THE KEYS? YOU'RE NOT WEARING YOUR BELT, RICKY. WHERE ARE THE KEYS?

THE JIGSAW RICKY WAS DOING IN HIS ACHING HEAD WAS SUDDENLY SOLVED.

BOY!!

WHAT BOY?

IN THE JOHN. DEAD IN THE JOHN.

DEAD? OH, CHRIST, DEAD? ARE YOU SURE?

IT SEEMED RICKY WAS IN SOME SORT OF TRANCE.

WHERE ARE THE KEYS? RICKY. IT'S IMPORTANT. CONCENTRATE.

KEYS?

SHE WANTED TO SLAP HIM NOW.

ON THE FLOOR.

IN THE JOHN? ON THE FLOOR IN THE JOHN, RICKY?

HE NEEDED.

THE MOVEMENT OF HIS HEAD SEEMED TO DISLODGE SOME TERRIBLE THOUGHTS. SUDDENLY IT SEEMED RICKY WAS GOING TO WEEP.

IT'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT.



IT OCCURRED TO HER, AS SHE STEPPED THROUGH THE DOOR, THAT SHE'D NEVER BEEN IN A MEN'S TOILET BEFORE, AND SHE SINCERELY HOPED THIS WOULD BE THE FIRST AND ONLY OCCASION.

THE TOILET WAS EMPTY. THERE WAS NO BOY ON THE FLOOR, DEAD OR ALIVE.



THE KEYS WERE THERE, THOUGH, WITH RICKY'S BELT LYING IN THE GUTTER OF THE URINAL.

GOD, HE LOOKED ILL. SOME OF HER SYMPATHY EVAPORATED, HOWEVER. HE WAS OBVIOUSLY HAVING HALLUCINATIONS, AND THEY PROBABLY HAD CHEMICAL ORIGINS.

IT WAS HIS OWN DAMN FAULT.



THERE'S NO BODY IN THERE, RICKY.

WHAT?!

THERE'S NO BODY IN THE JOIN; NOBODY AT ALL. WHAT ARE YOU ON, ANYHOW?

I'M NOT ON ANYTHING, HONESTLY.

SHE HALF-SUSPECTED THAT HE'D SET HER UP FOR THIS SOMEHOW, EXCEPT THAT PRACTICAL JOKE'S WEREN'T HIS STYLE. RICKY WAS QUITE A PURITAN IN HIS WAY, THAT HAD BEEN ONE OF HIS ATTRACTIVE.



DO YOU NEED A DOCTOR?

NO.

ARE YOU SURE?

I SAID NO.



OKAY, I OFFERED.

BY THE WAY, I THINK WE'VE GOT AN INTRUDER. THERE WAS SOMEBODY ON THE EXTENSION LINE. DO YOU WANT TO STAND WATCH BY THE FRONT DOOR WHILE I FETCH A COP?



IN A MINUTE.

MEN

RICKY SAT IN THE FLICKERING LIGHT AND EXAMINED HIS SANITY. IF BIRDY SAID THE BOY WASN'T THERE, THEN PRESUMABLY SHE WAS TELLING THE TRUTH.

THE BEST WAY TO VERIFY WAS TO SEE FOR HIMSELF. THEN HE'D BE CERTAIN HE'D SUFFERED A MINOR REALITY CRISIS BROUGHT ON BY SOME BAD DOPE, AND HE'D GO HOME.

EXCEPT THAT HE DIDN'T WANT TO PUT HIS HEAD IN THAT EVIL-SMELLING ROOM. SUPPOSE SHE WAS WRONG, AND SHE WAS THE ONE HAVING A CRISIS? WEREN'T THERE SUCH THINGS AS HALLUCINATIONS OF NORMALITY?

IT WAS MURKY INSIDE, BUT HE COULD SEE ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT THERE WERE NO SAND-STORMS, OR DEAD BOYS, NO GUN-TOTING COWBOYS, NOR EVEN A SOLITARY TUMBLE-WEED.

"IT'S QUITE A THING, THIS MIND OF MINE TO HAVE CREATED AN ALTERNATIVE WORLD SO EERILY WELL."

AND THEN HE SAW THE BLOOD.

HAY HE DIDN'T IMAGINE IT AT ALL. THERE WAS BLOOD.

PITY IT COULDN'T BE TURNED TO BETTER USE THAN SCARING HIM SHITLESS.

BUT JESUS IN HEAVEN, WHICH WAS WORSE? TO SEE, OR NOT TO SEE...

THE STALL DOOR WAS CLOSED. HADN'T IT BEEN OPEN BEFORE?

THE MURDERER, WHOEVER HE WAS, HAD PUT THE BOY IN THERE.

RICKY KNEW IT WITHOUT LOOKING.

OKAY, NOW I'VE GOT YOU...





THE FAT BITCH
HAD BEEN WRONG.



BIRDY...
BIRDY...

THERE WAS
DEATH IN
HERE.



THE WALL LIGHTS DANCED BEHIND THEIR DECO
SHADES, GLITTERING LIKE CANDLES ON THE
VERGE OF EXTINCTION.

DARKNESS WOULD
BE TOO MUCH; HE'D
LOSE HIS MIND.



THERE WAS SOME-
THING FAMILIAR
ABOUT THE WAY
THE LIGHTS
FLICKERED;
SOMETHING HE
COULDN'T QUITE
PUT HIS FINGER
ON.



THEN THE VOICE
CAME.

HELLO,
RICKY.



NOT BIRDY. NO.
BIRDY NEVER
WORE A WHITE
GOSSAMER
DRESS.

AREN'T YOU GOING TO SAY HELLO ?

...EF...

RICKY,
RICKY, RICKY.
AFTER ALL
THIS TIME ?

ALL THIS TIME ? WHAT
DID SHE MEAN--ALL
THIS TIME ?

WHO
ARE
YOU ?



AS IF YOU
DIDN'T
KNOW.

NOBODY DIES IN
THE MOVIES, RICKY.
YOU KNOW THAT AS
WELL AS I DO. YOU
CAN ALWAYS THREAD
THE CELLULOID UP
AGAIN--

THAT WAS
WHAT THE
FLICKERING
REMINDED
HIM OF THE
FLICKER OF
CELLULOID
THROUGH
THE GATE OF
A PROTECTOR.
ONE IMAGE
NOTION THE
NEXT THE
ILLUSION OF
LIFE
CREATED
FROM A
PERFECT
SEQUENCE
OF LITTLE
DEATHS.

"YOU'RE NOT
MARILYN.
MARILYN'S
DEAD."

--AND WE'RE
ALIVE. ALL-TALKING.
ALL-SINGING. WE
NEVER FLUFF OUR
LINES, NEVER AGE,
NEVER LOSE OUR
TIMING--

YOU'RE
NOT
REAL.

HE SUDDENLY WANTED TO TAKE
HER, THERE, IN THE AISLE. WHAT
THE HELL IF SHE WAS FICTION.

I
WANT
YOU.

I WANT
YOU. IN FACT,
I NEED YOU.
I'M VERY
WEAK.

WEAK?

IT'S NOT EASY
BEING THE CENTER OF
ATTENTION, YOU KNOW. YOU
FIND YOU NEED IT, MORE AND
MORE. NEED PEOPLE TO
LOOK AT YOU. ALL THE
NIGHT, ALL THE
DAY.

I'M
LOOKING.

AM I
BEAUTIFUL ?

YOU'RE
A GODDESS,
WHOEVER YOU
ARE.

I'M
YOURS. THAT'S
WHO I AM.

IT WAS THE PERFECT ANSWER. SHE WAS
DEFINING HERSELF THROUGH HIM. I AM
A FUNCTION OF YOU ; MADE FOR YOU
OUT OF YOU. THE PERFECT FANTASY.



KEEP LOOKING AT ME --
LOOKING **FOREVER**, RICKY.
I NEED YOUR LOVING
LOOKS. I CAN'T LIVE
WITHOUT THEM.



THE MORE HE STARED AT HER, THE STRONGER HER IMAGE SEEMED TO BECOME. THE FLICKERING HAD ALMOST STOPPED; A CALM HAD SETTLED OVER THE PLACE.

DO
YOU WANT
TOUCH ME?



YES...



GOOD.

SHE WANTED
A GAME.

THAT WAS
FINE WITH
HIM.



SHE'D RUN INTO A
CUL-DE-SAC. THERE
WAS NO WAY OUT
FROM THIS END OF
THE CINEMA. AND
JUDGING BY THE
COME-ONS SHE
WAS GIVING HIM,
SHE KNEW IT.



RICKY REACHED FOR HER AGAIN AND THIS TIME SHE DIDN'T AVOID HIS TOUCH.



THE DRESS BILLOWED UP A LITTLE HIGHER AND HE COULDN'T HELP BUT STARE, FIXATED, AT THE PART OF MARILYN HE'D NEVER SEEN. THE FUR DIVIDE THAT HAD BEEN THE DREAM OF MILLIONS.



THERE WAS BLOOD THERE. THE FAULTLESS GLOSS OF HER FLESH WAS SPOILED SLIGHTLY.



BUT STILL HE STARED AS SHE MOVED HER HIPS, AND HE REALIZED THE GLINT OF WETNESS WAS NOT THE JUICE OF HER BODY, BUT SOMETHING ELSE ALTOGETHER.



AS HER MUSCLES MOVED...



...THE BLOODY EYES SHE'D BURIED IN HER BODY SHIFTED AND FELL.

SHE KNEW BY THE LOOK ON HIS FACE THAT SHE HADN'T HIDDEN THEM DEEP ENOUGH, BUT WHERE WAS A GIRL WITH BARELY A VEIL OF CLOTH COVERING HER NAKEDNESS TO HIDE THE FRUITS OF HER LABORS?



YOU
KILLED
HIM.

PERVERSELY, HIS DISGUST
FED HIS LUST INSTEAD OF
KILLING IT.

SO WHAT IF SHE WAS A
MURDERER; SHE WAS
A LEGEND.



LOVE ME.
LOVE ME
FOREVER.

HE CAME TO HER, KNOWING NOW FULL WELL THAT IT WAS DEATH TO DO SO. BUT DEATH WAS A RELATIVE MATTER; WHAT IF MARILYN WAS DEAD IN THE FLESH, BUT ALIVE HERE, EITHER IN HIS BRAIN, OR IN THE BUZZING MATTRESS OF THE AIR, OR BOTH, AND HE COULD BE WITH HER.

IT WAS EASY. HER LIPS WERE SOFTER THAN HE'D HAD BEFORE, AND HE FELT SOMETHING CLOSE TO EXHAUSTION IN HIS CHEST. HE WANTED TO BE IN HER SO MUCH.

HER EMBRACE WAS TIGHTENING. HE STRUGGLED AGAINST THE DISCOMFORT.

NO USE, YOU'RE MINE.

JESUS CHRIST!

LOOK AT ME, BOY.

IT WASN'T MARILYN THAT HAD HIM IN ITS ARMS ANY MORE; NOTHING LIKE HER.

HIS SPINE CREAKED UNDER PRESSURE.

YOU MAKE ME STRONG. LOOKING AT ME THAT WAY, I NEED TO BE LOOKED AT, OR I DIE. IT'S THE NATURAL STATE OF ILLUSIONS.

YOU SHOULD HAVE GOT OUT OF TOWN.

WHO ARE YOU?

HIS CAPTOR DIDN'T ANSWER. HE WAS FEEDING OFF HIS FASCINATION.

I NEED YOU.

ITS VOICE NOW NEITHER WAYNE NOR MONROE, BUT A CRUDE, UNCULTIVATED VOICE, A THUD'S VOICE.

I'M SO FUCKING WEAK. IT USES ME UP, BEING IN THE WORLD.

...DRAINING OUT HIS LIFE THROUGH HIS EYES.

IT WAS MAINLINING ON HIM, FEEDING ITSELF ON HIS STARES, ONCE ADORING - NOW HORRIFIED, HE COULD FEEL IT DRAINING OUT HIS LIFE...

THE SENSATION WAS DISGUSTING,
AND HE WANTED TO CRY OUT FOR
IT TO STOP. BUT THE FINGERS
WERE WORKING THEIR WAY INTO
HIS HEAD...

...BURSTING HIS EARDRUMS
AND PASSING ON LIKE
INQUISITIVE TAPEWORMS,
THROUGH HIS BRAIN AND
SKULL...

HE WAS ALIVE, EVEN NOW, AND
HE KNEW THAT THE FINGERS
HAD FOUND HIS EYEBALLS
AND WERE PRESSING ON
THEM FROM BEHIND

MOMENTARILY, RICKY SAW
THE WORLD FROM A DIFFERENT
ANGLE AS HIS SENSE OF
SIGHT CASCADED DOWN

THERE WAS HIS LIP...

...HIS CHIN...

SPLAT!

IT WAS AN APPALLING EXPERIENCE,
AND MERCIFULLY SHORT.

THEN THE FEATURE RICKY'D LIVED FOR
THIRTY-SEVEN YEARS SNAPPED IN
MID-REEL, AND HE SLUMPED IN THE
ARMS OF FICTION.

RICKY'S SEDUCTION AND DEATH HAD
OCCUPIED LESS THAN THREE MINUTES.
IN THAT TIME BIRDY HAD TRIED EVERY
KEY ON RICKY'S KEYS AND COULD GET
NONE OF THE DAMN THINGS TO OPEN THE
DOOR.

BY THE TIME SHE'D
GIVEN UP THE JOB,
SO HAD RICKY. SHE
SHOOK AT THE KEYS
AND ADMITTED
DEFEAT. RICKY
CLEARLY HAD A
KNACK FOR THESE
WRETCHED THINGS
THAT SHE'D NEVER
QUITE GRASP.

GOOD LUCK TO HIM. ALL
SHE WANTED NOW WAS
TO BE OUT OF THIS
PLACE. IT WAS GETTING
CLAUSTROPHOBIC.

SHE DIDN'T LIKE BEING LOCKED IN, NOT
KNOWING WHO WAS LURKING AROUND
UPSTAIRS.

AND NOW, TO CAP IT
ALL, THE LIGHTS IN
THE FOYER WERE
ON THE BLINK,
DYING AWAY
FLICKER BY
FLICKER.

WHAT THE HELL WAS
GOING ON IN THIS
PLACE, ANYHOW?

RICKY?

THE DARK SEEMED TO SWALLOW
HER WORDS. EITHER THAT OR
SHE DIDN'T BELIEVE IT WAS
RICKY AT ALL, AND SOMETHING
WAS TELLING HER TO MAKE
HER APPEAL. IF SHE HAD TO,
IN A WHISPER.

RICKY...

THE LIPS OF THE SWING-
DOORS SAUGHED
TOGETHER GENTLY AS
SOMETHING PRESSED
THEM FROM THE OTHER
SIDE.

... IS
THAT
YOU?

THE AIR WAS ELECTRIC.
THE HAIRS ON HER ARMS
WERE RISING.

SHE STOPPED ADVANCING, THINKING BETTER
OF HER ENQUIRIES. IT WASN'T RICKY,
SHE KNEW THAT.

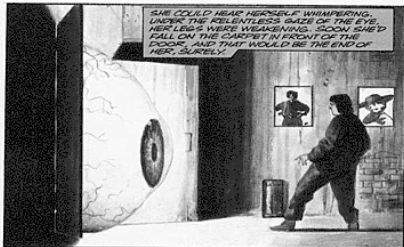
MAYBE IT WAS THE MAN OR
WOMAN ON THE PHONE. SOME
PEERLESS DYSID LUNATIC WHO
GOT OFF ON STALKING FAT
WOMEN.



HERE'S
LOOKING AT
YOU, KID

THE NOISE DEAFENED HER, THE EYE,
HUGE AND WET AND LAZY, SCANNING
THE DOLL IN FRONT OF IT WITH THE
INSOLENCE OF ONE TRUTH GOD. THE
WAKES OF CELLULOID EARTH AND
CELLULOID HEAVEN.

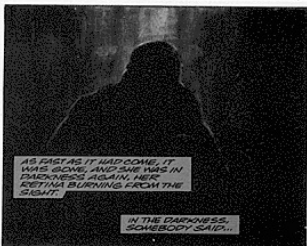
BIRDY WAS TERRIFIED, NO OTHER WORD FOR
IT. THIS WASN'T A LOOK-BEHIND-YOU THRILL,
NO PLEASURABLE FRIGHT. IT WAS REAL
FEAR, BOWEL FEAR, UNADORNED AND
UGLY AS SHIT.



SHE COULD HEAR HERSELF WHIMPERING, UNDER THE RELENTLESS GAZE OF THE EYE. HER LEGS WERE WEAKENING. SOON SHE'D FALL ON THE CARPET IN FRONT OF THE DOOR, AND THAT WOULD BE THE END OF HER, SURELY.

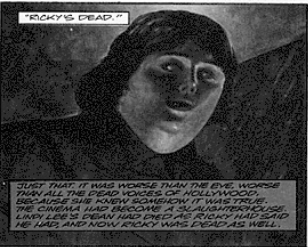


THEN SHE REMEMBERED THE LEAD PIPE IN HER HAND. BLESS ITS PHALLIC HEART.



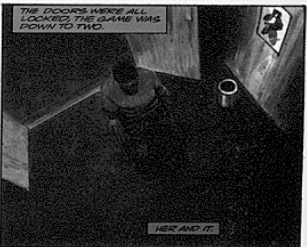
AS FAST AS IT HAD COME, IT WAS GONE, AND SHE WAS IN DARKNESS AGAIN. HER RETINA BURNING FROM THE SIGHT.

IN THE DARKNESS, SOMEBODY SAID...



"RICKY'S DEAD."

JUST THAT. IT WAS WORSE THAN THE EYE, WORSE THAN ALL THE DEAD VOICES OF HOLLYWOOD, BECAUSE SHE KNEW SOMEHOW IT WAS TRUE. THE CINEMA HAD BECOME A SLAUGHTERHOUSE. LINDY LEE'S DEAN HAD DIED AS RICKY HAD SAID HE HAD, AND NOW RICKY WAS DEAD AS WELL.



THE DOORS WERE ALL LOCKED. THE GAME WAS DOWN TO TWO.

HER AND IT.



SHE MADE A DASH FOR THE STAIRS, NOT SURE OF HER PLAN OF ACTION, BUT CERTAIN THAT REMAINING IN THE FOYER WAS SUICIDAL.

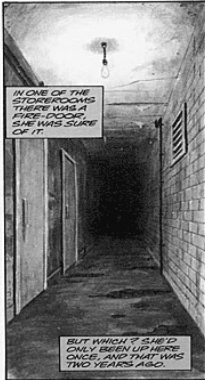
SOMETHING WAS BEHIND HER, FAST AND FLICKERING.

IT WAS PREPARING ANOTHER TRICK, SHE WAS CERTAIN OF IT.



SHE REACHED THE TOP OF THE STAIRS WITH HER ADMIRER STILL ON HER HEELS.

AHEAD THE CORRIDOR PROMISED VERY LITTLE COMFORT. IT RAN THE FULL LENGTH OF THE CINEMA AND THERE WERE A FEW STORE ROOMS OFF IT.



IN ONE OF THE STOREROOMS THERE WAS A FIRE DOOR. SHE WAS SURE OF IT.

BUT WHICH? SHE'D ONLY BEEN UP HERE ONCE, AND THAT WAS TWO YEARS AGO.



SHIT.

SHIT.

SHIT.

IT WAS LOCKED AND TOO HEAVY TO BREAK DOWN.

GIVEN TEN MINUTES AND THE HELP OF THE LEAD PIPE SHE MIGHT DO IT. BUT THE EYE WAS AT HER BACK.

SHE DIDN'T HAVE TEN SECONDS, NEVER MIND TEN MINUTES.



THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT BUT CONFRONTATION.

SHE SPUN, BUT THE THING WASN'T IN FRONT OF HER AT ALL.



IT WAS BEHIND.



SHE BEGAN, FOR THE FIRST TIME,
TO UNDERSTAND THE ORIGIN OF
THIS REMARKABLE SPECIES.

IT WAS A GHOST OF THE
MACHINE OF THE CINEMA...

... A SON OF CELLULOID?

"GIVE YOUR SOUL TO ME,"
SAID A THOUSAND STARS.

I DON'T
BELIEVE IN
SOULS.

"THEN GIVE ME WHAT YOU GIVE
TO THE SCREEN, WHAT EVERY
BODY GIVES. GIVE ME SOME
LOVE."

THAT'S WHY ALL THOSE SCENES WERE PLAYING, AND REPLAYING, AND PLAYING AGAIN, IN FRONT OF HER. THEY WERE MOMENTS WHEN AN AUDIENCE WAS MAGICALLY UNITED WITH THE SCREEN, BLEEDING THROUGH ITS EYES, LOOKING, AND LOOKING AND LOOKING.

SHE'D DONE IT HERSELF, OFTEN, SEEN A FILM AND FELT IT SO DEEPLY IT WAS ALMOST A PHYSICAL PAIN WHEN THE CREDITS ROLLED AND THE ILLUSION WAS BROKEN, BECAUSE SHE FELT SHE'D LEFT SOMETHING OF HERSELF BEHIND, A PART OF HER INNER BEING LOST UP THERE AMONGST HER HEROES AND HEROINES.

MAYBE SHE HAD LOST SOMETHING. MAYBE THE AIR CARRIED THE CARDS OF HER DESIRES, AND DEPOSITED THEM SOMEWHERE, INTERMINGLED WITH THE CARDS OF OTHER HEARTS, ALL GATHERING TOGETHER IN SOME NICHE, UNTIL --

UNTIL THIS.

THE CHILD OF THEIR COLLECTIVE DREAMS: THIS TECHNICOLOR SEDUCER, TRITE, CRASS, AND UTTERLY BEWITCHING.

EVEN AS SHE SORTED THE ENIGMA OUT, SHE WAS LAPPING UP THE PICTURES IN THE THING. SHE COULDN'T HELP HERSELF: TEASING GLIMPSES OF LIVES SHE'D LIVED, FACES SHE'D LOVED...

...PEOPLE SO ENGRAVED ON OUR HEARTS THEY NEED NO CHRISTIAN NAMES.

AND SO MUCH BITTER TO BE TEASED BY THESE MOMENTS, TO BE SHOWN ONLY THE PRE-KISS MELT, NOT THE KISS ITSELF...

...THE GLAD, NOT THE RECONCILIATION, THE SHADOW, NOT THE MONSTER, THE WOUND, NOT DEATH.

IT HAD HER IN THRAL, NO DOUBT OF IT. SHE WAS HELD BY HER EYES AS SURELY AS IF IT HAD THEM OUT ON THEIR STALK, AND CHAINED.

"AM I BEAUTIFUL?"

YES, IT WAS BEAUTIFUL.

"WHY DON'T YOU GIVE YOURSELF TO ME?"

SHE WASN'T THINKING ANY MORE. HER POWERS OF ANALYSIS HAD DRAINED FROM HER...

...UNTIL...

SOMETHING APPEARED IN THE MIDDLE OF IMAGES THAT SLAPPED HER BACK TO HERSELF.

JUMBO, THE FAT PINK ELEPHANT, HER FAT ELEPHANT--NO, MORE THAN THAT--THE FAT ELEPHANT SHE'D THOUGHT WAS HER.

THE SPELL BROKE.

THEY'D CALLED HER JUMBO AS A CHILD, ALL THE KIDS ON THE BLOCK. SHE'D LIVED WITH THAT RIDICULOUS PINK HORROR FOR TWENTY YEARS, NEVER ABLE TO SHAKE IT OFF.



ITS FAT BODY REMINDED HER OF HER FAT, ITS LOST LOOK OF HER ISOLATION. SHE THOUGHT OF IT COGLED IN THE TRUNK OF ITS MOTHER, AND SHE WANTED TO BEAT THE SENTIMENTAL THING SENSELESS.

IT'S A FUCKING LIE.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.

THE LIGHT BEGAN TO FLICKER, THE PARADE OF TRAILERS FALTERING.

WHAT'S UNDER ALL THE PIZZAZZ? SOMETHING VERY NASTY, I THINK.

THE BOARDS BENEATH HER FEET WERE CRACKING, BUT SHE WAS TOO INTERESTED IN HER QUARRY TO LISTEN TO THEIR WARNINGS. IT WAS TIME SHE GOT HOLD OF THIS KILLER, SHOOK IT AND MADE IT SPIT ITS SECRETS.

WHAT ARE YOU UNDER, THERE?
WHAT ARE YOU HIDING, eh?

YOU TRIED TO KILL ME.

I WANT TO LIVE.

SO DO I.

IT FOUND A VOICE. A FRIGHTENED HUMAN VOICE.

"YOU'VE NO BUSINESS WITH ME."

IT WAS GETTING DARK THIS END OF THE CORRIDOR, AND THERE WAS AN OLD, BALD SMELL HERE, OF ROT. HE'D KNOWN ROT, AND THIS WAS SOMETHING ANIMAL.

THEY'D GONE ALMOST THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF THE CORRIDOR NOW, HER ADVANCING, IT RETREATING.



THERE WAS NOWHERE LEFT FOR THE THING TO GO.

SUDDENLY THE FLOOR-BOARDS FOLDED UP.

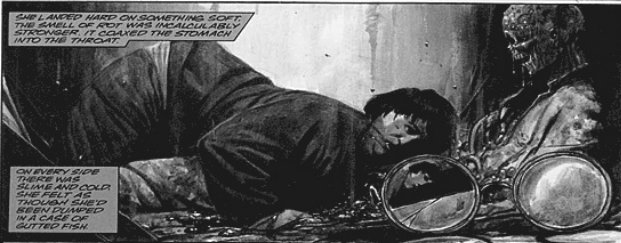


BIKEDY THREW OUT HER HANDS TO GRAB HOLD OF SOMETHING...

...BUT IT WAS ALL WORM-RIDDEN, AND CRUMBLING IN HER GRASP.



SHE LANDED HARD ON SOMETHING SOFT. THE SMELL OF ROT WAS INCALCULABLY STRONGER. IT COAKED THE STOMACH INTO THE THROAT.



ON EVERY SIDE THERE WAS SLIME AND COLD. SHE FELT AS THOUGH SHE'D BEEN DUMPED IN A CASE OF GUTTED FISH.

SHE WAS LYING IN THE REMAINS OF A MAN.



SHE WANTED TO HOWL. HER INSTINCT WAS TO TEAR OFF HER SKIRT AND BLOUSE, BOTH COVERED IN GUEY MATTER, BUT SHE COULDN'T GO NAKED, NOT IN FRONT OF THE SON OF CELLULOID.

IT STILL LOOKED DOWN AT HER.

"NOW YOU KNOW."

THIS IS YOU --

"THIS IS THE BODY I ONCE OCCUPIED, YES. HIS NAME WAS BARBERIO. A CRIMINAL. NOTHING SPECTACULAR. HE NEVER ASPIRED TO GREATNESS."

AND YOU ?





THE SON OF CELLULOID WAS
WEEPING. ITS TRUE BODY
EXPOSED. NOW IT HAD NO
REASON TO FURTHER
GLORY.

I'M HIS CANCER. I'M THE
PIECE OF HIM WHICH DID
ASPIRE, THAT DID LONG
TO BE MORE THAN A
HUMBLE CELL.

I AM
A DREAMING
DISEASE. NO WONDER
I LOVE THE MOVIES.



IT WAS A FILTHY THING. A TUMOR
GROWN EATEN WASTED PASSION.

I'M GOING TO HAVE TO
FIND A NEW WAY TO EAT
YOUR SOUL.

THE CRAWLSPACE WAS
NARROW. THERE WAS
NO WAY OUT BUT THE
WAY SHE'D COME, AND
THAT WAS FIFTEEN
FEET ABOVE HER HEAD.



IT REVOLTED HER
AS NOTHING HAD
BEFORE. IT
BROUGHT TO
TO MIND SOME
THINGS ABSORBED
A BUCKET-
CASE.

GO TO
HELL.

SHE COULD FEEL
THE CHURNING
MOTION OF ITS
INNARDS AS IT
ROSE UP TO HER.



ITS BULK ON HER
BELLY AND GROIN
WAS ALMOST
SEXUAL, AND AS
REVOLTED AS
SHE WAS BY
HER OWN
TRAIN OF
THOUGHT
SHE
WONDERED
ONLY IF
SUCH A
THING
ASPIRED
TO SEX.

SOMETHING ABOUT
THE INSISTENCE
OF ITS FEELERS
AGAINST HER SKIN
ONLY MADE SENSE
AS DESIRE.



"LET IT COME
LET IT COME
IF IT HAS TO."



SHE LET IT CRAWL, FIGHTING
EVERY MOMENT THE URGE
TO THROW IT OFF.

AND THEN SHE SPRAWS
HER TEARS.

SHE ROLLED OVER.



SHE'D WEIGHED 225 POUNDS AT LAST COUNT, AND SHE WAS PROBABLY MORE NOW. THE THING WAS BENEATH HER BEFORE IT COULD WORK OUT HOW OR WHY THIS HAPPENED.



IT FOUGHT, BUT IT COULDN'T GET OUT FROM UNDER. NOW, EVER MUCH IT SQUIRMED.



AFTER A WHILE, THE DREAMING DISEASE STOPPED FIGHTING.

BIRDY LAY STILL FOR A MOMENT.

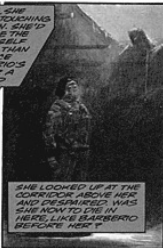


UNDERNEATH HER, NOTHING MOVED.

IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW IF THE TUMOR WAS DEAD. IT HADN'T, BY ANY STANDARDS, THAT SHE UNDERSTOOD, LIVED.



BESIDES, SHE WASN'T TOUCHING IT AGAIN. SHE'D WRESTLE THE DEVIL ITSELF RATHER THAN EMBRACE BARBERO'S CANCER A SECOND TIME.



SHE LOOKED UP AT THE CORRIDOR ABOVE HER AND DESPAIRED WAS SHE NOW TO LIE IN HERE, LIKE BARBERO BEFORE HER?

THEN SHE NOTICED THE GRILLE. IT HADN'T BEEN VISIBLE WHILE IT WAS STILL NIGHT OUTSIDE.

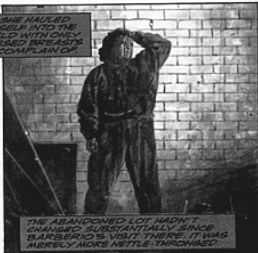


NOW DAWN WAS BREAKING, AND COLUMNS OF DAYLIGHT WERE CREEPING THROUGH THE LATTICE.

SHE KEPT THINKING EVERY
MOMENT THAT SHE FELT
THE THING CRAWLING
ACROSS HER LEGS...

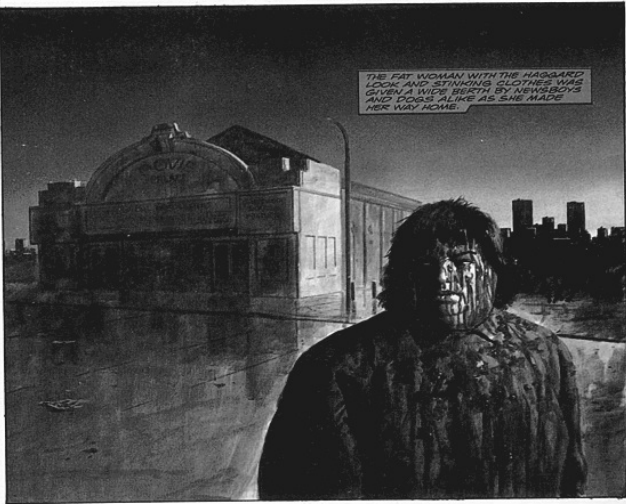


BUT SHE HAULED
HERSELF INTO THE
WORLD WITH ONLY
SKULDED BREASTS
TO COMPLAIN OF



THE ABANDONED LOT HADN'T
CHANGED SUBSTANTIALLY SINCE
BARBERIO'S VISIT THERE. IT WAS
MERELY MORE NETTLE-THROWED.

THE FAT WOMAN WITH THE HAGGARD
LOOK AND STINKING CLOTHES WAS
GIVEN A WIDE BERTH BY NEWSBOYS
AND DOGS ALIKE AS SHE MADE
HER WAY HOME.



IT WASN'T THE END

THREE: THE CENSORED SCENES

THE POLICE WENT TO THE MOVIE PALACE JUST BEFORE NINE-THIRTY. BIRDY WENT WITH THEM. THE SEARCH REVEALED THE MUTILATED BODIES OF DEAN AND KICKY, AS WELL AS THE REMAINS OF "SONNY" BARBERIO. UPSTAIRS THEY FOUND A CERESE ENOS.

BIRDY SAID NOTHING, BUT SHE KNEW. LINDY LEE HAD NEVER LEFT.

SHE WAS PUT ON TRIAL FOR A DOUBLE MURDER NOBODY REALLY THOUGHT SHE'D COMMITTED AND ACQUITTED FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE. IT WAS THE ORDER OF THE COURT THAT SHE BE PUT UNDER PSYCHIATRIC OBSERVATION FOR A PERIOD OF NOT LESS THAN TWO YEARS. THE WOMAN MIGHT NOT HAVE COMMITTED MURDER, BUT IT WAS CLEAR THAT SHE WAS A RAVING LUNATIC.

TALES OF WALKING CANCERS DO NOBODY'S REPUTATION MUCH GOOD

IN THE EARLY SUMMER OF THE FOLLOWING YEAR, BIRDY GAVE UP EATING FOR A WEEK. MOST OF THE WEIGHT LOSS IN THAT TIME WAS WATER, BUT IT WAS SUFFICIENT TO ENCOURAGE HER FRIENDS THAT SHE WAS AT LAST GOING TO TACKLE THE BIG PROBLEM.

THAT WEEKEND, SHE WENT MISSING FOR TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.



BIRDY FOUND LINDI LEE IN A DESERTED HOUSE IN SEATTLE. SHE HADN'T BEEN SO DIFFICULT TO TRACE. IT WAS HARD FOR POOR LINDI TO KEEP CONTROL OF HERSELF THESE DAYS, NEVER MIND WOULD-BE PURSUERS.

AS IT HAPPENS, HER PARENTS HAD GIVEN UP ON HER SEVERAL MONTHS EARLIER.



ONLY BIRDY HAD CONTINUED TO LOOK, PAYING FOR AN INVESTIGATOR TO TRACE THE GIRL.



AND FINALLY HER PATIENCE WAS REWARDED WITH THE SIGHT OF THE FRAIL BEAUTY, FRAILER THAN EVER BUT STILL BEAUTIFUL SITTING IN THIS RARE ROOM.

FLIES ROAMED THE ROOM. A TURTLE, PERHAPS NIMAN, SAT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOOR.



LINDI LOOKED UP FROM HER THOUGHTS, OR MAYBE ITS THOUGHTS, AND SMILED AT HER.



THE GREETING LASTED A MOMENT BEFORE THE PARASITE IN LINDI LEE RECOGNIZED BIRDY'S FACE, SAW THE GUN IN HER HAND AND KNEW EXACTLY WHAT SHE'D COME TO DO.

WELL.



LINDY LEE BURST. THE TUMOR POURED OUT OF HER IN RIVERS. IT CAME OUT OF HER MILKLESS BREASTS, A CUT IN HER THUMB, FROM AN ABRASION ON HER THIGH.

WHEREVER LINDY WAS OPEN, IT CAME.



BIRDY FIRED THREE TIMES.



ONCE IT WAS STILL, BIRDY CALMLY TOOK THE ACID BOTTLE OUT OF HER POCKET, UNSCREWED THE TOP AND EMPTIED THE SCALDING CONTENTS ON HUMAN LIMB AND TUMOR ALIKE.

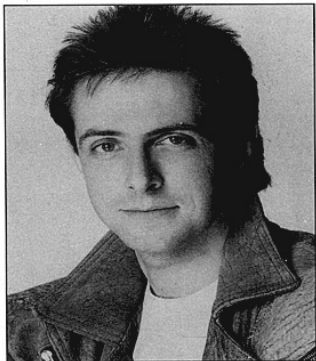


SHE STEPPED OUT OF THE HOUSE. HER DUTY DONE, AND WENT HER WAY...

...CONFIDENTLY PLANNING TO LIVE LONG AFTER THE CREDITS FOR THIS PARTICULAR COMEDY HAD ROLLED.



THE END

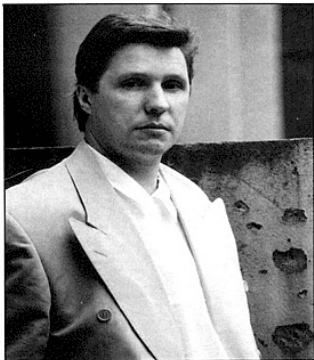


CLIVE BARKER's nightmarish stories have captivated millions of readers and filmgoers. From his short stories in the *Books of Blood* to such best-selling novels such as *Weaveworld*, *Cabal*, *The Damnation Game*, and *The Great and Secret Show*; from his blockbuster films *Hellraiser* and *Hellbound*, to *Nightbreed*; and from the graphic adaptations of his stories to comics in *Tapping the Vein*, *Hellraiser*, and *Nightbreed*, Barker has utilized all aspects of popular culture to create an indelible and unique vision of modern horror.

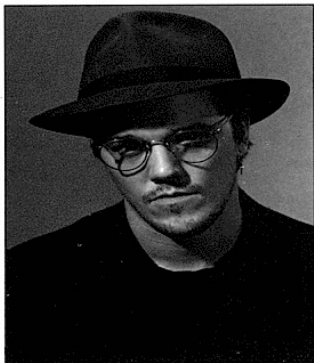
A coffee table book of his illustrations—*Clive Barker, Illustrator*—which includes character designs for many of his films, has just been published by Eclipse Books.

Son of Celluloid is the latest graphic adaptation from his *Books of Blood* short stories to be published by Eclipse Books. Upcoming stories to be illustrated by modern masters of sequential art include *The Yattering and Jack*, *Dread*, *Age of Desire*, *Revelations*, and *The Great and Secret Show*.





LES EDWARDS was born in 1949 in Walthamstow, East London and grew up and went to art school in East Ham. Noted for his cover paintings for British paperback publishers, Les has produced a large body of work, including covers for books by Michael Moorcock, Ramsey Campbell, Robert E. Howard, Frank Herbert, and many others. His paintings have also been used for record album covers by Monty Python, Uriah Heep, and Krokus. *Blood & Iron*, a collection of Les Edwards' paintings, has been published in the U.K. by GW Books. He lives in Ilford with Valerie Paine, whose Young Artists agency represents his work. *Son of Celluloid* is his graphic album debut.



STEVE NILES was born and raised in Washington DC. He edited and published a comics horror anthology entitled *Fly in My Eye* and a limited edition portfolio of Clive Barker's *Books of Blood* cover illustrations before joining Eclipse Books in 1989. He currently edits or scripts most of Eclipse's graphic adaptations of Clive Barker's stories and has edited *Clive Barker, Illustrator*, a coffee table book of Barker's art. He is also the editor of a comics adaptation of Fritz Lang's *M* by Jon J Muth, a new comics anthology entitled *Anxiety Times*, and he continues editing and writing occasional scripts for *Fly in My Eye*. He lives in Washington DC, where he performs live and records with the band Gray Matter.

FROM THE WICKED IMAGINATION OF

CLIVE BARKER

COMES A HORRIFIC TALE OF A THEATRE
STALKED BY THE MOST FAMOUS MOVIE
STARS OF OUR TIME!



WHEN AN ESCAPED CONVICT COMMITS MURDER AND
FINDS HIS WAY TO A DECAYING MOVIE PALACE, HE CANNOT KNOW
THAT HIS OWN LIFE IS ABOUT TO END, WHILE THE DREAMS OF A HALF
DECADE'S MOVIEGOERS ARE JUST BEGINNING. FOR THIS CONVICT'S
CANCEROUS TUMOR REFUSES TO DIE, AND THE ANGELS OF THE
CINEMA CAN GRANT MIRAGES—AND NIGHTMARES—OF THEIR OWN.

IN A WORLD THAT HAS GIVEN UP GOD FOR GARBO, LIFE MAY BE
NOTHING MORE THAN AN ENDLESS SERIES OF FLICKERING IMAGES—
AND DEATH THE ONLY REFUGE FROM THE...*SON OF CELLULOID.*

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